

JANUARY 10, 1974

Small flurries of wind shift large quantities of the Shortgrass soil. Cows cause a dust storm coming to the feed wagons. Old ewes can be traced for miles walking down the dust trails. After dusk is the best time to see the country.

Hombres in the coffee houses are starting to show symptoms of drouth strain. Every time they shift their weight, they seem to be taking a fresh hold. All of us realize overhead is so high that a short drouthlet would clean s faster than any device ever uncrated in Las Vegas.

To increase the tension, pinto beans are quoted at \$39 a hundred wholesale. Sixteen hundred tons of dynamite dropped right in the middle of the Shortgrass Country wouldn't be as disruptive as running out of bean money. The industry has already outlived plagues that'd minimize the final days of the Roman Empire, yet we haven't ever faced a catastrophe without the backing of frijoles.

Here at the ranch, I've ordered the two passports to start eating on the top end of the replacement heifers. Twenty years ago when I arranged their entry, I didn't agree to try to out-menu a Miami Beach hotel. We settled that matter back when hominy went to 18 cents a can. I might not be able to pass the second day of college economics, but I can figure that a 40 cent cattle market won't buy beans at the same price.

As I told them they might as well start facing the crises. With everything short from Aunt Tillie's toilet water to detergent fossil fuel, they are going to have to start eating beef steak and acting like they like it.

Lots of those sensitive tongued city folks are going to have to be utilized as a protein substitute. It doesn't matter how much they enjoy the feel of cheese and peanut butter stuck to the roofs of their mouths. What used to be, isn't any more.

I never have believed that beef was completely gone from the markets. Ground hamburger could still be added to tuna-noodle loaf without killing the tin can flavor that has become so popular. Slivers of chuck could still be used to fortify canned soup without ruining the savory taste of mashed carrots and limp rice.

People can change fast. Overnight, they could discover that the richness of sirloin or round could be hidden in a soybean casserole.

Unless the consumers lose all their teeth from eating soft food, we could make a big comeback in '74. Four or five cases of noodle strangulation followed by an outbreak of tunafish neurosis could boom the beef trade. Once the doctors start digging macaroni shells and sardine bones from people's craws, the craze may change back to reason.

I never did understand the consumers' revolt in the first place. The whole deal reminded me of a herd of horses praying that a hard freeze would kill the oat patches.

As stretched as those two Latin cowboys' stomachs are, they'll make a big slash in the heifers by spring. Black cattle may not be as good as beans, bur I'm not about to throw away what's left on high priced frijoles.